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4

13 November 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: OCI Historian

SUBJECT : White House Interest in Operations  
Center Alerting

1. During my years as SDO, there were several occasions on which our alerting got the kind of reception/reaction from the White House described in [REDACTED] memo 25X1A of 25 October. Because considerable repetition would be involved, I have not answered the questions in Paul's memo in turn, but have rather let each incident speak for itself. Please don't accept the dates as being precise--they're approximate, but I think accurate within a couple of weeks of the incident.

2. On almost all of the occasions below, we in the Operations Center were aware that the President was personally interested in what was going on. As so often happens, however, his interest was either conveyed to us by someone else or was inferred from the circumstances involved and the actions taken. One night in the summer (?) of 1966, for example, we briefed the White House on current developments in Vietnam. Shortly thereafter, we were told that the President wanted us to tell Abe Fortas what had happened. I called Mr. Fortas at home and briefed him.

3. It is almost a truism that we in the intelligence business are seldom privy to the policy decisions made on the basis of the information we provide. One of my initial tours as regular Night SDO proved the exception.

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5. Many other incidents were equally exciting but less publicly known--and some never got to the public at all. Shortly after the 6-day war, the embassy in Rome came in (during the night, of course) with a flash NODIS cable alleging that a high-ranking member of Nasser's entourage was secretly presenting a peace plan for the Middle East. His terms were that the plan had to be accepted within 24 hours, and about 8 of the 24 had already elapsed. White House interest was very high. We were requested to get a read-out on the Egyptian official and to confirm or deny that he had made the offer. I alerted the DCI, who simultaneously gave the CSDO and me our marching orders. There were several problems. The Egyptian was in Cairo and the Americans had just been thrown out. The Canadian Embassy was handling US interests--

6. There were times when the hottest "news"--and high Presidential interest--turned out to be no news at all. In early 1968, there were reports that SA-3

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missiles were being introduced into southern North Vietnam. A Black Shield mission was laid on. On the night that the photography was due in Washington, my instructions from the DCI were to keep him closely informed, get the NPIC readout into proper language, and get it out to the ranch ASAP. The readout was slow in arriving by an hour or so, and the Texas White House called into the Operations Center for the DCI. The Director came into the Operations Center to discuss this and another matter with the White House on the secure phones. The photography revealed no SA-3s.

7. King Constantine's abortive attempt to overthrow the junta in Athens in December 1967 has always stuck in my mind as a classic example of the alert function and of the Agency's ability to get things done in a hurry. We got the word at about 0300 that Constantine planned to move within the next five hours.

(The Cable Sec duty officer told us we'd damned well better read this one). I alerted the Director, who told me to call Mr. Rostow at home, brief him and do whatever he said. Rostow told me to alert the Sit Room that he was on his way in, and would wake the President when he got there. In the meantime, he wanted a copy of our cable--which we LDXed--and the NODIS cable that Embassy Athens had filed. At about 0700, Rostow called to say that he had not received the State cable or any subsequent reporting from the embassy.

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8. There were several other less dramatic incidents in which the White House was closely interested, and some--such as the Pueblo seizure and the bombing of the US barracks at Pleiku--in which NMCC had the primary alert function. Those above are still pretty fresh in my mind. Memory being a fallible thing, however, I would ask that you dig out the log to double-check me on time and details.



25X1A

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